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ABSTRACT

A comparison of the educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of 900 seniors in four Chicago high schools showed that college prep students had the highest educational and occupational aspirations and expectations. Vocational students had the greatest discrepancy between occupational aspirations and expectations, while general education students showed the least discrepancy between aspirations and expectations on either job or educational variables. Data, acquired from a student aspiration questionnaire, raw scores on a reading achievement test, and information from student records, also showed that achievement scores have very low correlations with expectations, but other achievement indices, like class rank, have higher correlations with expectations. Students with higher expectations for education and jobs are more active in extracurricular activities and take more mathematics courses. (Tables show the relationship between educational aspirations and educational expectations, occupational aspirations and expectations, correlations among variables, and reading test scores for the students from a large vocational high school, an all-black school in an economically depressed neighborhood, a school with an economically and racially diverse student body, and a white, middle class high school.) (KC)

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A STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL AND JOB ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

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John Q. Easton

Paper presented at the 1980 annual meeting,
American Educational Research Assocation, Boston, Massachusetts

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Research in the area of education job aspirations and expectations has found typically that student goals are unrealistically high both in terms of the present attainment of students and availability of educational and occupational opportunities (for example, Cosby, Thomas and Falk, 1976). However, there is also research (Chisman, 1974) indicating that students who receive career exploration education aspire to and expect to enter the skilled and semi-skilled technical and trade professions appropriate to their training. Similarly, there are reports (Blackburn, 1974) that the discrepancy between aspirations and expectations is least for vocational education students. Aspirations are frequently thought to be the students' wishes or hopes, whereas the expectaions are more realistic and attainable.

The present study was conducted to discover the precise educational and job aspirations and expectations of seniors in four Chicago high schools. The study was designed to compare the achievement and aspirations and expectations of students in vocational education programs to students in college prep and general education programs. In addition, the relationship between aspirations and expectations to student achievement and other measures of student status, such as attendance, was investigated.

METHOD

About 900 high school seniors participated in this study. The seniors attended four Chicago high schools, including A., a large vocational high school, B. an all black school in an economically depressed neighborhood, C., a school with an economically and racially diverse student body and D., a white, middle class high school. In two of the schools, the vocational school and the all black high school (A & B), all students were included in at least one aspect of the study. In the other two schools (C & D), students in three to five homerooms were randomly sampled to participate in the study.

There were three sources of data, a student aspiration questionnaire, raw scores on a reading achievement test, and information from student records kept in the school offices.

The aspiration questionnaire was administered to all subjects in the study. Achievement data was collected from the same group of students who completed the questionnaire. The achievement test provided raw scores for reading comprehension and for vocabulary. About 900 seniors completed the tests and the aspiration questionnaire. Information from the office records was obtained for about 500 students, most of whom completed the achievement test and the aspiration questionnaire. Office records were taken for students who took the achievement test in schools B, C, and D, while in school A a sample of the records was taken. Table I shows what students were in the study.

The student aspiration questionnaire contained twenty questions about students' school work and their educational, income, and job aspirations and expectations.

Educational aspiration was measured by asking "How far would you like to go with your education?" and educational expectation was measured by asking, "When it comes right down to it, how far do you mind you'll get with your education?"

The job aspiration was measured by asking students, "Ideally, what kind of work do you want to do for a career?" (Be specific, for example: accountant, CTA driver, dental hygeniest, etc.) and expectation was measured by replacing "ideally" with "realistically."

There were also self report measures of high school grade point average, attendance and tardiness, number of science, math, and foreign language courses taken, number of extra curricular activities and self-concept measures for school and work. The students' records in the school offices were examined to collect students' age, sex, class rank, and the actual number of absences, tardies, and number of courses taken in math, science, foreign language, and vocational education. This data was collected in March, 1979.

RESULTS

Achievement

The results of the reading achievement test were examined for differences between schools and programs. The mean number of items correct, out of 90, the standard deviation and the number of students tested in each program at the four schools are presented in Table II. The mean scores for each group of students ranges from a low of 48.9 for college prep students at School B to a mean of 84.6 for college prep students at School D. In two of the three schools that have both a general academic program and college prep program, the college prep students have lower scores than the general students, whereas the order is reversed in the third school. In School D, which has students from three programs, the scores are ordered highest for college prep, next for the academic general students, and finally for vocational students. Because of the diversity of the schools, and the different procedures for placing students into programs, mean scores for the different programs across the four schools were not calculated or discussed.

Educational aspiration and expectation

A comparable effect of school and program was not found for the educational and occupational variables. In the three schools with general academic and college prep programs, the college prep students have higher aspirations and expectations than the general academic students. The aspiration and expectations of the vocational students at School A were between those of the college prep and general academic students at Schools B, C, and D. The mean ratings for educational aspirations and expectations are presented in Table III. The ratings were obtained by coding the responses from 1 to 5, with 1 represented by "graduate from high school," 2 by "some college," 3 by "two year college degree," 4 by "four year college degree," and 5 by "graduate or professional degree."

In every case, the aspiration ratings are higher than the expectation ratings, and the differences between educational aspirations and expectations are greatest for the college prep students. The means are shown in Table III.

The mean rating for these variables show that, on the average, the seniors both aspire to and expect to receive relatively many years of education. Of the entire sample, 40% aspire to a graduate or professional degree, 33% to a four year college degree, 13% to a two year college degree, and 7% to some college. Only 8% want to finish their education with graduation from high school. In comparison, only 30% of the whole sample expect to earn a graduate or professional degree, 38% a four year college degree, 16% a two year college degree, 9% some college, and 8% to graduate from high school. There is a shift from aspiration to highest educational category to expectation for more modest attainments. The correlation between educational aspiration and educational expectation is substantial (.75, n= 873).

Although educational aspirations and expectations are very similar, there are differences between the two. The greatest difference between aspiration and expectation occurs for the college prep students. The mean difference between aspiration and expectation is .29 at School B, .25 at School C, and .22 at School D for college prep students. The mean difference between aspiration and expectation for vocational students is .14 at School A, and .08 at School D, and the differences between aspiration and expectation for the general academic students is .17 at School B, .00 at School C, and .18 at School D.

Job Aspiration and expectation

The open-ended job aspiration and expectation responses were ordered on a 7 point occupational scale, which was derived from the Hollingshead scale. It contains the following categories: 1) executives and major professionals, 2) lesser professionals, 3) administrators and small businessmen, 4) clerical and sales, 5) skilled manual employees, 6) semi-skilled employees, and 7) unskilled employees. For the 854 seniors who responded to this question, 23% aspired to the first category, 23% to the second, 28% to the third, 8% to the fourth, 16% to the fifth, 2% to the sixth, and less than 1% to the seventh. In contrast, 19% expected to reach the highest job category, 25% expected the second and 25% the third category, and 11% the fourth, 16% the fifth, 4% the sixth, and again less that 1% the lowest category. The students differ in their aspirations and expectations by what program they are enrolled in. Proportionately more of the college prep students aspire to and expect to enter the highest category, and proportionately more of the vocational students expect to enter the skilled trades.

The aspirations are for higher positions than the expectations and the greatest difference between aspiration and expectation occurs for vocational students. The correlation between job aspiration and job expectation is .80 (n=819). The proportion of students who choose each job category is presented in Table IV.

Relationship of Educational Job Aspirations and Expectations in other Variables

Although there are mean differences between aspirations and expectations, they are highly correlated, and have comparable relationships with other variables. Factor analyses were performed on the data in order to make discoveries about the underlying relationships among the variables. Several analyses were done in order to look at different groups of students and at different subsets of variables. In all of the different analyses, educational aspiration and expectation, and job aspiration and expectation emerged as distinct factors. In all cases, no other variables have high loadings on either the education or job factors. Because aspiration and expectation appear on the same factor for education and job, they may not represent distinct concepts. Other factors that repeatedly appeared included a factor representing standardized test achievement scores, and another factor representing school performance measured by class rank or student estimate of GPA.

Educational and job expectation (as well as aspiration) both have low but positive correlations with reading scores on the achievement test, even though the school with the highest reading score has the lowest expectation scores. There is a stronger correlation between educational and job expectation and class rank than between expectation and the test scores: The correlations between educational and job expectation, reading achievement, class rank, grade point average (self report), school self concept, number of math courses, and number of teams and clubs are presented in Table V.

The students with high educational and job expectations have higher school self concepts than students with lower expectations, but they do not have higher self concepts about themselves as workers. The high expectations students are more likely to have taken SAT or ACT tests, and they expect to have their first full time jobs at later dates than students with lower expectations. The number of clubs and teams that students belong to is significantly correlated to expectations, and the number of math courses taken is correlated to expectations, but not the number of science courses. Actual attendance and tardiness data is not significantly related to expectations, although student report of the two is related to educational expectations. The number of courses taken by students as juniors is related to educational and job expectations, whereas the number of courses taken as freshmen is not, and the number taken as sophomores is related only to educational but not job expectations.

Discussion

The correlation evidence and the factors indicate that the students' aspirations and expectations have tenuous connections to the activities and behaviors that are required to meet high expectation and that they may not represent distinct constructs. Achievement test scores have very low correlations with expectations, but other achievement indices, like class rank, have higher correlations with expectations. On the average, students with higher expectations for education and jobs are more active in their school experience. The activity includes taking math courses, taking college entrance exams, and belonging to teams and clubs. The relationships are significant but generally weak. The correlation between job expectation and educational expectation is also low.

The discrepancy between job aspiration and expectation was higher for vocational students than for either the general academic or the college prep students. The college prep students showed a greater discrepancy between their educational aspirations and expectations than either academic general or vocational students. The general students showed less discrepancy between aspirations and expectations on either job or educational variables. This suggests that the general academic students are the most "unrealistic" because their expectations do not differ from their aspirations. The vocational students may aspire to very high status jobs, but perhaps because of their training, they have expectations that are more veridical to their experiences. Similarly, the college prep students have higher educational aspirations than expectations, but because of their understanding of the requirements for attaining much education, their expectations are not so great. The general academic students may not be as "realistic" because their curricular program is a "default" program that does not have goals for either employment or further education. These differences between aspiration and expectation are small, however.

TABLE I

WHAT STUDENTS WERE IN STUDY

DATA	SCHOOLS A	B	C	D
Achievement Test	All students	All students	3 homerooms	5 homerooms
Aspiration Questionnarie	All students	All students	3 homerooms	5 homerooms
Office Records	Random sample	All students	3 homerooms	5 homerooms

TABLE III

MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND SAMPLE SIZE FOR EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION AND EDUCATION EXPECTATION

		ASPIRATION				EXPECTATION			
PROGRAM		School A	School B	School C	School D	School A	School B	School C	School D
Academic General	$\bar{X}$=	-	3.6	4.1	2.7	-	3.4	4.0	2.6
	SD=	-	1.3	1.3	1.4	-	1.3	1.3	1.3
	N=	<10	134	33	35	<10	130	34	33
College Prep	$\bar{X}$=	-	4.2	4.[illegible]	4.2	-	3.9	4.3	4.0
	SD=	-	0.8	0.6	0.9	-	1.1	0.6	0.9
	N=	<10	31	18	41	<10	31	16	41
Vocational	$\bar{X}$=	4.0	-	-	2.3	3.9	-	-	2.2
	SD=	1.2	-	-	1.3	1.1	-	-	1.2
	N=	472	<10	<10	25	465	<10	<10	25
Other	$\bar{X}$=	4.4	-	-	-	4.2	-	-	-
	SD=	0.9	-	-	-	1.1	-	-	-
	N=	55	<10	<10	<10	55	<10	<10	<10
TOTAL	$\bar{X}$=	4.0	3.7	4.2	3.2	3.9	3.5	4.0	3.1
	SD=	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.4	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.4
	N=	531	168	58	101	524	164	57	99

NOTE: Means and standard deviations are not presented in cells with n<10. These cases are included in the column totals.

TABLE II
MEANS STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND SAMPLE SIZE
ON A READING ACHIEVEMENT TEST

PROGRAM		SCHOOL A	B	C	D
Academic General	$\bar{X}$=	-	55.6	69.0	82.7
	SD=	-	16.4	12.9	6.8
	N=	<10	117	25	23
College Prep	$\bar{X}$=	-	48.9	66.9	84.6
	SD=	-	16.5	18.2	8.4
	N=	<10	28	15	33
Vocational	$\bar{X}$=	71.2	-	-	77.6
	SD=	12.2	-	-	9.3
	N=	434	<10	<10	15
Other	$\bar{X}$=	60.7	-	-	-
	SD=	14.3	-	-	-
	N=	50	<10	<10	<10
TOTAL	$\bar{X}$=	70.1	54.2	67.6	82.5
	SD=	12.8	16.7	15.2	8.5
	N=	488	148	48	71

NOTE: Means and standard deviations are not presented in cells with n<10. These cases are included in the column totals.

TABLE IV

STUDENT JOB ASPIRATION AND EXPECTATION

JOB CATEGORY	ASPIRATION			EXPECTATION		
	GENERAL	COLLEGE PREP	VOCATIONAL	GENERAL	COLLEGE PREP	VOCATIONAL
1. EXECUTIVE: CPA, Lawyer, Physician	17%	31%	24%	15%	33%	18%
2. LESSER PROFESSIONAL Accountant, Librarian Teacher	28%	27%	21%	29%	28%	23%
3. ADMINISTRATORS Insurance agent, Legal/Medical Secretary	27%	25%	27%	27%	17%	26%
4. CLERICAL: Clerk, Keypunch operator, typist	8%	8%	8%	10%	12%	10%
5. SKILLED MANUALS: Carpenter, Electrician, Machinist	13%	7%	19%	10%	7%	21%
6. SEMI-SKILLED: Aide, Bus Driver	6%	2%	1%	9%	4%	2%
7. UNSKILLED: Cafeteria Worker, Janitor	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%

TABLE V
CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES

	Educational Expectation	Job Expectation	Reading Test Score	Class Rank	Self Report of GPA	School Self Concept	Number of Math Courses	Number of Teams and Clubs
Educational Expectation	-	808	740	363	859	870	425	873
Job Expectation	.44	-	706	345	813	824	403	827
Reading Test Score	.12	.14	-	354	765	771	775	776
Class Rank	.36	.27	.34	-	388	394	508	397
Self Report of GPA	.25	.19	.26	.65	-	898	901	901
School Self Concept	.22	.15	.27	.37	.43	-	459	912
Number of Math Courses	.22	.22	.07	.40	.28	.27	-	462
Number of Teams and Clubs	.22	.17	.19	.34	.31	.25	.26	-

NOTE: The numbers above the diagonal are the number of cases used to compute the correlation coefficients which are presented below the diagonal

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